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ABSTRACT

Defining a learning center as a classroom area containing several learning stations where students may work independently with materials which teach, reinforce, or enrich their skills, this guide presents essential considerations for designing such a center. Among the items discussed are scheduling, time management techniques, and record keeping systems. Specific instructions for arranging and furnishing the classroom center are outlined and illustrated. A list of materials needed for various kinds of centers as well as hints for constructing stations and organizing and storing materials are also included. The guide concludes with a bibliography of additional works concerning learning centers. (FL)

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A Peek... at Primary

LEARNING CENTERS

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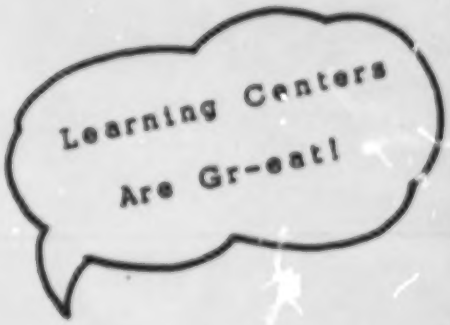


A LEARNING CENTER is a well defined area in a classroom where one or more pupils can work independently using a variety of learning materials. This collection of materials teaches, reinforces, or enriches a group of skills or concepts. Within each learning center are several individual learning stations that deal with one skill or concept.

A GOOD PRIMARY LEARNING CENTER IS---

* Attractive and inviting.
* Based on clearly stated learning objectives.
* Self checking.
* Composed of a variety of types of activities.
* Easy to understand.
* Made up of activities which vary in difficulty.
* Geared to the abilities, interest, and needs of the students.

VALUES OF LEARNING CENTERS TO YOUNG CHILDREN

1. The utilization of learning centers allows for individual learning styles.
2. Children develop independence in learning and self-discipline.
3. Children learn to work together to accomplish common learning goals.
4. Children learn responsibility for the use and care of materials.
5. Materials are available for students at all levels of difficulty.
6. Learning centers are highly motivational and help children develop creative thinking skills.
7. The correct use of learning centers encourages children to evaluate their own performance.
8. Children receive practice in decision-making.
9. Children learn to follow directions.

VALUES OF LEARNING CENTERS TO TEACHERS

1. The use of learning centers frees the teacher to direct other activities or observe students with learning problems.
2. Learning centers can be created to reinforce a skill already introduced, help students discover new areas of interest or obtain diagnostic information.
3. Learning centers provide the opportunity for teachers to individualize instruction without new materials.
4. The teacher's knowledge of educational materials is increased.

A PLAN FOR DEVELOPING A LEARNING CENTER

1. Determine the concepts or skills that will be reinforced or taught at the center. (Study skills ladders or scope and sequence charts of different subject areas.)

2. Plan theme of learning center and choose formats for each learning station. Remember each child in your classroom should be able to experience success in at least one station at a center.

3. Develop a record keeping system.

4. Design a method of evaluation where both student and teacher can evaluate the effectiveness of the learning center.

   Some methods of evaluating centers are ---

   Buzz Sessions
   Teacher Observations
   Anecdotal Cardfile
   Student Work Folder
   Individual Conferences
   Written Pre and Post Test
   Students' Oral Response in Skill Groups

5. Gather materials and equipment for center.

6. Construct the learning center.

7. Introduce the center to students explaining directions, record-keeping, and evaluation procedures.

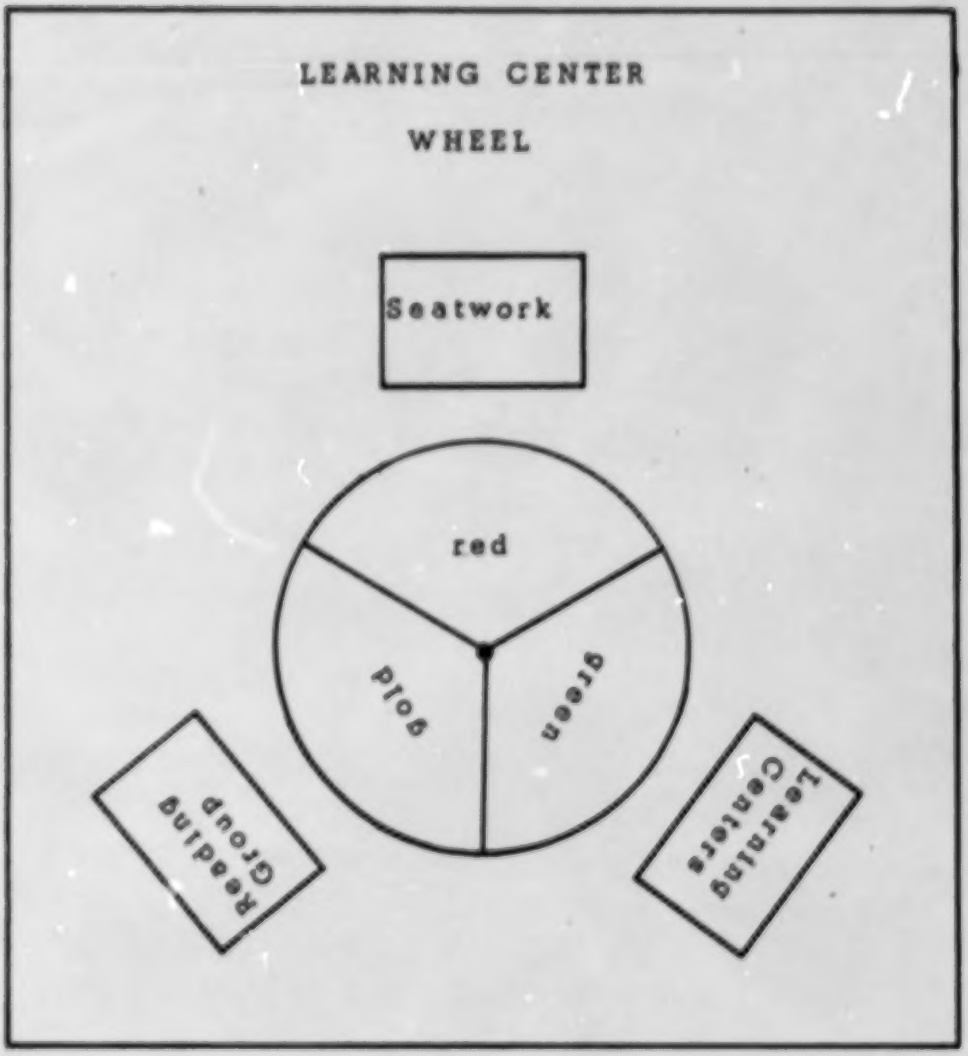
8. Continue to evaluate operation of center, making modifications as needed.

SCHEDULING PRIMARY LEARNING CENTER TIME

Primary teachers use learning centers primarily to reinforce skills already presented. In some classrooms, centers are available after a child finishes his/her other work. In other classrooms all the students go to centers at the same time.

In another system, the teacher divides the class into three groups. One group has a teacher directed reading group, while another group does written seatwork activities, and the other group is at centers. Using this system every student gets a chance to go to centers, and not as many centers are required.

The following rotation wheel can be used to show students what they are supposed to be doing at different times. As a new reading group begins, the teacher moves the circle.


LEARNING CENTER
WHEEL
Seatwork
red
gold
green
Reading Group
Learning Centers

MANAGEMENT OF PRIMARY LEARNING CENTERS

1. Before allowing children to go to new centers, be sure you have introduced each activity and everyone understands how each center operates. Role playing helps to demonstrate how centers actually should be used.

2. During the first two weeks of school, allow all the students to go to the centers at the same time. Not only can you provide close teacher supervision of the learning centers, but this allows you time to closely observe your new class doing a variety of activities. This is also an ideal time to stress good housekeeping.

3. Label each center clearly, and always refer to that center by its correct name. Stress that certain materials belong in certain centers.

4. At the beginning of the school year, primary children should be able to work at centers for fifteen minutes. As the year progresses, the time can be increased to twenty minutes.

5. Children who are using time wisely and have not finished their learning center activities should be allowed to remain at the centers longer.

6. Never allow children to move from one center to another. Each center should contain enough activities to motivate every child for at least twenty minutes.

7. Change centers every three weeks or when interest wanes.

8. Specify the maximum number that can work at one center.

9. Every learning center classroom should have a monitoring system. Children at centers might raise their hand and have work completed checked by parent volunteers, student teachers, high school tutors, sixth grade students, or students within the classroom who have mastered the skills being checked. These people can answer questions and play board games with the students.

10. It is good to have a set of rules for using learning centers. These rules should be simple and to the point. The children should have a part in writing these rules. Suggested rules are:

    - Hold up your hand to have work checked.
    - Talk in a whisper.
    - Remain at one center.
    - Keep centers neat.

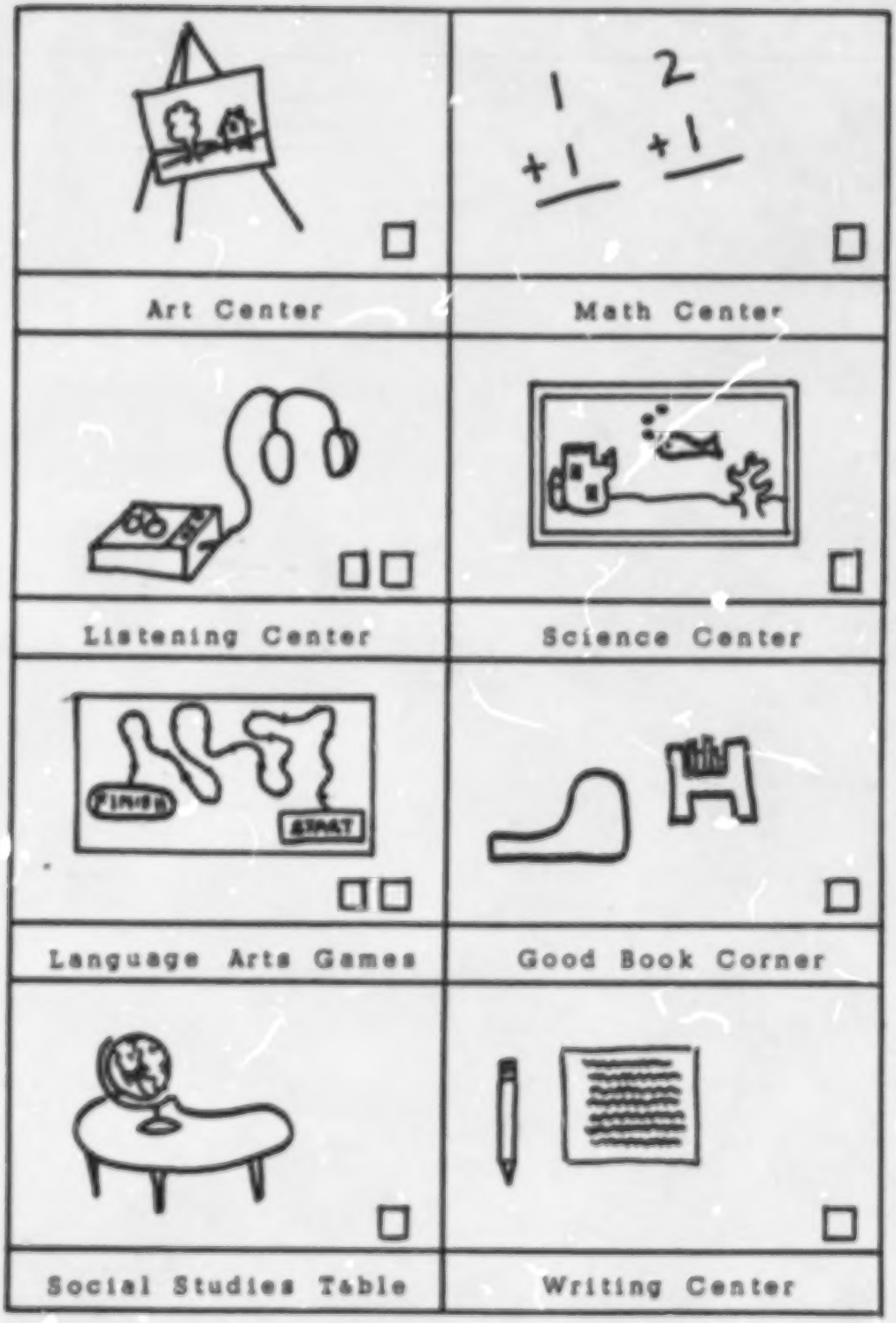
A SIMPLE RECORD KEEPING SYSTEM

The purpose of record keeping is to enable the teacher and students to know what has been done and what needs to be done. Primary children can actively be involved in simple record keeping systems.

The learning center card approach is especially well suited for younger children because little reading ability is required. Picture clues are the key to the effectiveness of this system. Each child has a folded card with his/her name written on the front. When using a center, the student marks the inside of the card to show what center he/she is working at, and then places the folded card at the center to show the center is being occupied. Later in the year, if the learning stations within a center are numbered, the child can also record what individual stations have been completed.

On the following page is a sample center card.

LEARNING CENTER CARD



SOME TIPS ON DESIGNING A PRIMARY LEARNING CENTER CLASSROOM

1. Begin slowly with one center and slowly add more centers when you are comfortable with existing centers. (Good Book Corner or Language Arts Games Corner are easy centers with which to begin.)

2. Do not move furniture without first sitting down and planning your classroom. It's best to draw a scale model of your classroom so you'll know where you're headed.

3. In general, it's best to place centers along the edges of your classroom and leave the middle for student seating. This cuts down on traffic through the centers.

4. Children's desks can be pushed front to front into seating clusters. This provides more space on the outer areas of the room for learning centers.

5. Decide the maximum number of students each center will handle. The physical area of the center should just be large enough for this number of students. An over-sized center can cause housekeeping and discipline problems.

6. In all classrooms there should be an area large enough for all children to meet.

7. Different centers require different things. When planning, keep in mind the location of bulletin boards and windows. A sink should be near the art center. Electrical outlets are a necessity for the listening center.

8. Every classroom should have quiet areas and noisy areas for learning games. Noisy areas should be located away from the reading circle or other quiet areas.

9. Carpet samples of varying sizes can be taped together using single-faced carpet tape. These colorful rugs can be used in areas where games are played or children read books.

   Source for Carpet Samples 27" x 48"
   J. C. Penney's Carpet Department - Northpark
   Price $3.00 each

10. Electrical spools available from electrical contractors make perfect learning center work areas for primary students. Paint the bottom and cover the top with linoleum scrap available free from any floor covering shop. Use regular tile adhesive to fasten linoleum top and then staple edges down with heavy duty stapler.

11. Upside down cardboard chemical barrels with the front cut away make cozy areas for reading. Be sure to wash them out and then place colorful pillows inside on the floor. How about a brightly painted old-fashioned bathtub for a reading corner for two or three? Line the inside of the tub with acrylic fur.

12. Such classroom furniture as dividers, tables, and cubbies can be constructed inexpensively from heavy duty tri-wall board. This furniture can be painted using a water base house paint or covered with contact paper.

    Source for Information on Cardboard Carpentry
    The Workshop for Learning Things
    5 Bridge Street
    Watertown, Mass. 02172

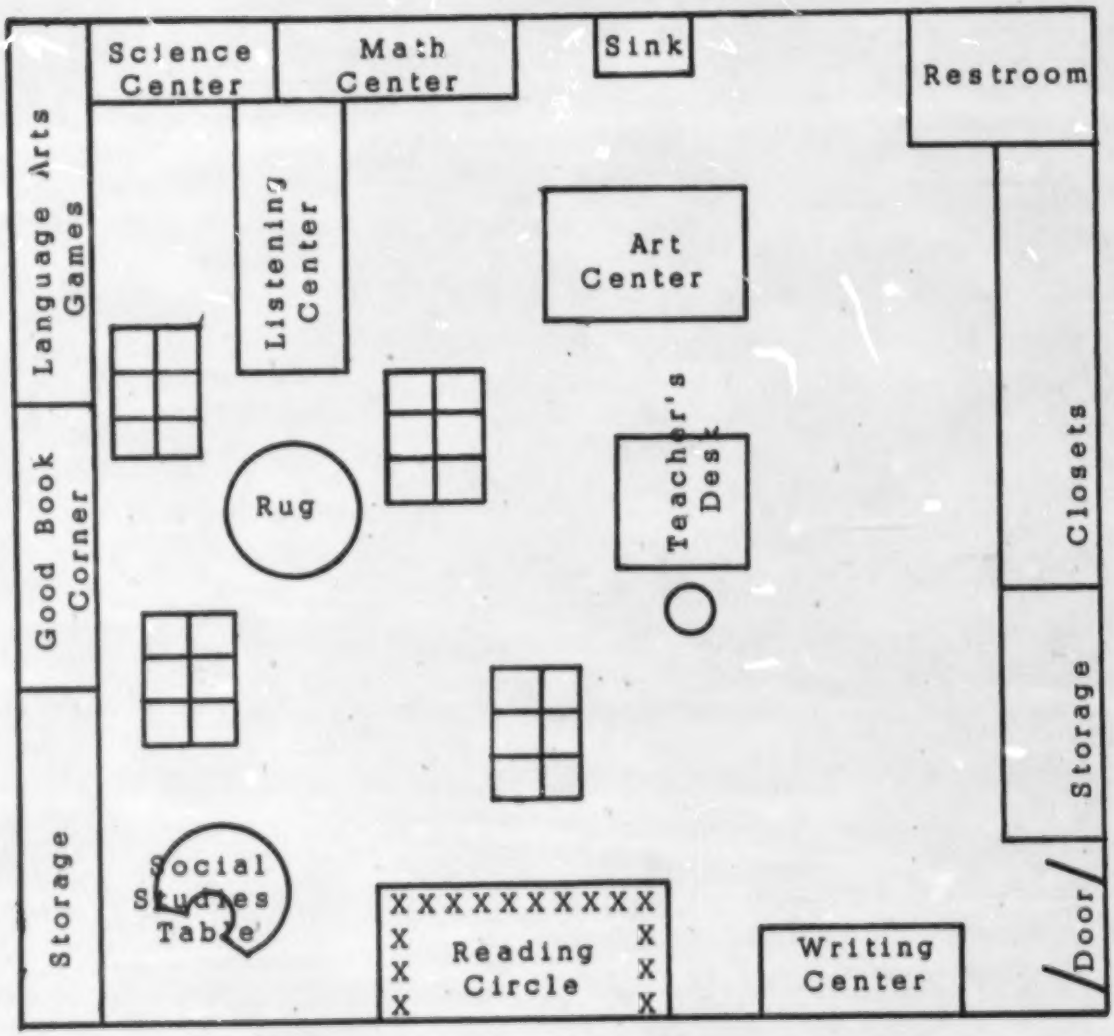
13. A variety of classroom furniture especially designed for learning centers is available from school supply stores. Children love to stretch out and read a good book on a fat mat lounger. These foam rubber whistle-shaped seats are covered with vinyl and are very durable. Educubes make a great addition to any primary classroom because of their many uses. These large plastic cubes can be used as chairs, learning center work areas, bookcases or props for creative dramatics.

    Source for Fat Mat Lounger
    Beckley-Cardy School Supply
    1900 No. Narragansett Ave.
    Chicago, Ill. 60639
    Price $22.95

Source for Educubes (set of 4)
Lattas School Supply
2218 Main St.
Cedar Falls, Ia. 50613
Price $70.00

14. Medium-sized bean bag chairs can be purchased at any discount store and can be used in a good book corner.

MY FIRST GRADE CLASSROOM TODAY



A LIST OF MATERIALS FOR PRIMARY

LEARNING CENTERS

Art Center

Past and Glue
Primary Scissors
Different Kinds of Paper
Tempera Paint and Brushes
Paper Punch
Brass Fasteners
Washable Markers and Colored Pencils
Clay
Old Catalogs and Magazines
Scrapbooks
Brown Paper Lunch Bags
Pipe Cleaners
Tongue Depressors and Popsicle Sticks
Material Scraps
Yarn, String and Ribbons
Wallpaper Scraps
Styrofoam Packing
Drinking Straws
Tin Foil

Math Center

Counters (milk jug caps and popsicle sticks)
Foam Rubber Dice
Crayon Response Cards
Rulers and Tape Measures
Addition and Subtraction Flash Cards
Primary Math Balance
Calendar
One Hundred Chart
Flannel Board and Pieces
Clocks
Dominoes
Numberlines
Counting Frames
Number Concept Cards
Teacher Made Learning Stations
Commercial Math Games

Listening Center

Listening Station
Record Player
Cassette Recorder
Various Tapes and Records
Talking Storybooks
Filmstrip Previewer
Filmstrips

Science Center

Books and Study Prints
Magnets
Scales
Magnifying Glasses
Prism
Small Animals in Cages
Plants
Terrarium
Aquarium
Outdoor Specimens
Collections of Shells, Rocks and Insects
Teacher Made Shoe Box Experiments (Free handout available from Region III Area Service Center for Gifted and Talented, P. O. Box 320, Carthage, Ill. 62321)

Language Arts Games

Letter Sound Cards
Color Word Cards
Vocabulary Flash Cards
Small Pocket Chart, Letter Cards, Word Cards and Picture Cards
Peg Board and Phonics Cards
Sandpaper Letters
Manipulatives for Developing Visual Discrimination and Motor Coordination
Magnetic Letter Boards
Individual Sized Chalkboards
Typewriter
Reading Skill Kits
Teacher Made Learning Stations
Commercial Games

Good Book Corner

Book Cases
Rocking Chairs or Stuffed Chairs
Pillows
Literature Books at Various Levels
Basal Reading Books
Poetry Books
Children's Magazines
School Newspapers
Flannel Board and Pieces for Storytelling
Viewmaster and Slides

Social Studies Table

Filmstrips and Slides
Tapes and Records
Charts and Posters
Study Prints
Resource Books and Pamphlets
Globes
Maps (Neighborhood, City, State, U.S. and World)
Atlases
Puzzles
Models (Community Helpers, Indians, etc.)
Things from Other Lands
Teacher Made Stations
Commercial Games
All About Me Activity Cards by Frank Schaffer (Wise Owl) $4.95
My Very Own Posters by Good Apple (Wise Owl) $1.00 per doz.

Writing Center

Crayons, Pencils, and Erasers
Various Sizes of Writing Paper and Picture Story Paper
Manuscript Letter Cards or Chart
Worksheet File of Letter Practice Sheets
Student Name and Address Cards
Picture Dictionaries
Word Lists
Lined Individual Chalkboard and Chalk
Choose-It-Box
Picture File
"Feelie" Bag
Teacher Made Learning Stations

Writing Center (Cont.)

Milton Bradley Learn to Write Manuscript Letters (Wise Owl) $5.00
Just Imagine Mini-Poster Cards by Trend (Wise Owl) $3.25
If I . . . 3 Part Flip Book by Trend (Wise Owl - Duck Creek) $3.25
Story Starters-Primary by Creative Teaching Press (Wise Owl) $4.95
Pencil Writers "The Story Starts Here" by Sr. Ros and Sr. Val (Institutional Media, Inc., 8141 East 44th St., Tulsa, Okla. 74145) $8.00

HELPFUL HINTS ON CONSTRUCTING LEARNING STATIONS

1. Tailor your learning station to teach a specific skill, not a particular unit in a reading series. A skill learning station can be used no matter what reading program you are using. On the back of the game, write the skill the game teaches.

2. Use permanent markers on playing cards or other games which are not laminated. Use water base felt pens on games going to be covered with clear contact so it will not bleed through the contact.

3. When applying clear contact, place sticky side of the contact face up. Place middle of game on contact paper, and press game onto contact paper working from center out. The piece of contact should be 3 inches bigger all around than the game you are covering so the edges can be folded over. If you must use two sheets of contact, overlap the sheets at least one inch so the edges will not turn up.

4. If you laminate a game, be sure to leave one-fourth inch of laminating material around the edges so the lamination will not come undone.

5. For quiet dice, use an electric knife and a sheet of three inch thick foam rubber. Cut the foam rubber into squares and using a permanent marker add dots or numbers.

6. Use an Elsie popsicle stick, a steel washer and a brass fastener to make a game spinner. Plunge the brass fastener with an Elsie stick and washer on it into the game board. Break off the Elsie stick and draw the spinner face.

7. Buttons, plastic milk bottle caps, or small plastic toys make great game tokens.

8. Use the back of slightly rough vinyl table covering for folding game boards. Sanford's Sharpie Markers can be used to draw on vinyl.

9. Playing cards are handy for small flashcards or card games. Attach small flashcards to game boards using chicken rings.

    Source for Playing Cards (box of 500)
    A.E.A. 9 I.M.C.
    Price $3.25

10. When making yarn games or mobiles, always use acrylic yarn. Worsted woolen yarn tends to stretch and break.

11. Sanford's Vis-A-Vis Pens can be used to write on contact or clear acetate. This writing can be removed with a wet cloth.

12. A Kwick-Twist Drill will punch holes in the middle of learning games.

    Source of Kwick-Twist Drill
    Latta's School Supply
    2218 No. Main St.
    Cedar Falls, Iowa 50613
    Price $3.65

13. Use rubber cement to apply small pictures to game boards. Elmer's Glue is messier and causes wrinkling. A book of small self-adhesive picture stickers is available, but it is very expensive.

    Source for Word Making Picture Stickers (600 stickers)
    Word Making Productions
    70 West Louise Ave.
    Salt Lake City, Utah 84115
    Price $12.50

14. To avoid lost pieces of games, color code the pieces and game boards.

15. To draw large cutouts for learning center bulletin boards use an overhead and either a transparency made from a coloring book or a transparency from a Trend Adapt-A-Board Book. Fill in characters with watercolor pens.

    Source for Adapt-A-Board Books
    Wise Owl - Duck Creek
    Price $3.95

SUGGESTIONS FOR ORGANIZING AND STORING MATERIALS

1. It is best to keep a recipe box type of file of what stations you have, where they are located, and what skill they teach. If the file is organized according to skills, you will know all of the materials you have for one skill and be able to determine what skill areas lack learning stations.

2. Smaller learning stations can be stored in large manila envelopes. Write the skill on top of the envelope and file the envelope in a large storage box according to skill taught. Use painted 12-inch boards and cement design blocks to construct storage shelves for larger materials. Each shelf might contain games that teach the same skill.

3. If your children have problems knowing where materials belong, color code materials for each center using colored circle stickers sold at office supply stores. These colored stickers also are great for trails on gameboards and decorations.

4. Use plastic dish pans or giant size detergent boxes covered with contact paper for worksheet files.

5. Various sized cans and small boxes covered with contact paper are handy at learning center areas for storing paper, pencils, and other supplies.

6. Flash cards should be printed in different colored markers so they can be sorted easily. They can be stored in painted pop cases or shoe bags.

7. Store card games in large band-aid cans.

8. When packaging games, remember variety is the spice of life. There is nothing more boring for children than working with folder type games all year.

Be Creative! Package your station in---
Cool Whip Containers
Plastic Soap Cases
Contact Covered Shoe Boxes
Pringle Cans

Plastic Gallon Milk Jugs (neck cut off, handle left on)
Restaurant Cottage Cheese Cartons (3 qt.)
Margarine Tubs
Cigar Type School Boxes
Zip-Loc Plastic Bags

9. Pattern cutting boards make terrific foldable learning centers. They can be stored folded-up and set up in minutes.

Trip Into Learning Centers by Nancy Carr (Ore Press)

Mitten Match by Barbara and Beverly Price (Instructional Fair, Inc.)

101 Ideas to Keep Learning Exciting by Harmon (Learning-Teaching Things)

Nooks, Crannies and Corners and other Kids' Stuff Books (Incentive Publications)

The Good Apple Spelling Book by Grimm and Mitchell (Good Apple)

Learning Centers - A Guide for Effective Use by Waynant and Wilson (Instructo Corporation)

Games That Teach by King (International Center for Educational Development)

Games for Individualizing Mathematics Learning by Kennedy and Michon (Charles E. Merrill Publishing)

70 Activities for Classroom Learning Centers by Dorothy M. Lloyd
(Instructor Publications, Inc.)

Readiness Joy, Word Attack Joy, and Comprehension Joy by Joy Keith

Change for Children by Kaplan, Kaplan, Madsen, and Gould (Goodyear)

A Young Child Experiences by Kaplan, Kaplan, Madsen and Gould (Goodyear)

Learning Centers in the Open Classroom by David Kahl and Barbara Gast
(International Center for Educational Development)

Creating the Open Classroom by Ishler and Ishler (D.O.K. Publishers, Inc.)

Language Arts Learning Station Book by Irene I. Donohoe (Trend)

Create Your Own Learning Center by Patricia Mummert (D.O.K. Publishers, Inc.)

Workjobs by Mary Lorton (Addison-Wesley Publishing)

Project Basic Reading Skill Stations by Cedar Rapids, Iowa Teachers
(Cedar Rapids Schools Educational Service Center Printing Department)